World Directory of Minorities

Brazil Overview

Environment

Brazil is the largest and most populous country in South America. Minority groups are prevalent in all regions of this diverse nation.

Peoples

Main languages: Portuguese, indigenous languages.

Main religions: Christianity (majority Roman Catholic, also Pentecostal), Afro-Brazilian religions (Candomblé, Umbanda), Judaism, indigenous religions.

Minority groups include Afro-descendants (at least 40%), Japanese (1%), indigenous groups including Yanomami, Tukano, Urueu-Wau-Wau, Awá, Arará, Guaraní, Nambiquara, Tikuna, Makuxi, Wapixana and Kayapó, Tapeba, Tremenbe, Kaiowa, Nandevi Guarani (totalling 0.2-0.4%) and Jews (data: Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística 2000, UNDP).

Brazil currently has 197 forest-dwelling indigenous groups, living either on reservations or in one of four national parks. According to the 2000 Brazilian Demographic Census, about 730,000 people or 0.4 per cent of the total population identified as indigenous. Nevertheless many non-governmental organization (NGO) leaders and scholars dispute these numbers and opt to use the 0.2 per cent figure from the 1991 Census. Although over half of the indigenous population is concentrated in the northern Amazon states and the north-east of the country, there is also a considerable indigenous population in the states of Mato Grosso do Sul and São Paulo, where 8.6 and 7.3 per cent of the total indigenous population reside, respectively (data: Instituto Socioambiental).

Afro-Brazilians are the majority in the north-eastern states. Large agricultural plantations and slave ports dominated this warm temperate region, but black people are also well represented in major industrial metropolitan areas throughout the country.

Excluding the period 1941-50, Japanese migration to Brazil has continued uninterrupted since 1908. By the 1980s their numbers had reached 750,000. Today, Brazil has the largest Japanese-descendant population outside of Japan, and there are strong ties between the two countries. Prior to 1914 the majority of Japanese immigrants were contracted labourers. Later, efforts were made to establish agricultural colonies. Many also worked on coffee plantations. Although they were the subject of

popular protest by xenophobic elements in Brazil in the early 1900s, Japanese and their descendants have become acculturated and accepted into middle-class society; trends in social mobility, industrialization and urbanization contribute constantly to this process. The largely Japanese-descendant Liberdade neighbourhood is a strong example of the Japanese-descendant presence in the heavily industrialized city of São Paulo. Mixed marriages among Issei (first-generation immigrants) are almost unknown, although they are common among second- and third-generation immigrants in urban areas.

Brazil's Jewish population lives mainly in São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro and Porto Alegre, with small communities in Pernambuco, Bahia, Belém and Manaus. Since 1945, Jews have played a part in all areas of Brazilian political, economic and military life. Historically anti-Semitism was not a major social problem in independent Brazil, and Jewish communities were able to retain their religion while serving in public life, unlike in neighbouring countries, such as Argentina, where conversion was required in order to obtain high-ranking positions in the military and government.

Since 2001, violence against Jews has increased. Brazil has several neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic organizations, active since the 1930s. *Carecas* (skinhead) groups operate in Brazil, mainly in the cities of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. Like their counterparts in Europe, many of them are neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic and xenophobic. The Confederação Israelita do Brasil (CONIB), founded in 1951, represents all the Jewish federations and communities in Brazil and campaigns against anti-Semitism in the media and more generally in Brazil.

History

Unlike most of Latin America, Brazil was colonized by the Portuguese. Initial relations with the indigenous population were friendly but colonists eager to exploit trade in wood and sugar soon provoked conflict. The massacres and slavery which almost exterminated the coastal Tupi initiated a pattern repeated over the next 500 years. Rival colonial powers, France and the Netherlands, exploited existing hostilities between indigenous groups. Colonists introduced dysentery, smallpox, influenza and plague. Epidemics of these European diseases swept through the *reduções* (settlements) instituted by Jesuit missionaries, killing many thousands of indigenous and tribal peoples within a few decades. According to the NGO Survival International the indigenous population of Brazil is less than 7 per cent of what it was in 1500. It is thought that during pre-colonial times there existed up to 1,000 distinct tribes, while today only an estimated 197 of these remain.

In the early nineteenth century, Brazil increased its traditional exports of cotton, sugar and coffee, encroaching still further on indigenous lands. A reported 87 indigenous groups were exterminated in the first half of the twentieth century through contact with expanding colonial frontiers. Between 1964 and 1984 foreign companies and international lending banks tightened control over Brazil's economic structure, continuing to expand the colonizing frontier. Roads stretching across the Amazon basin forced the removal of 25 indigenous groups at the time and the same trends continue. Pressures to expand the Brazilian economy have continued to aggressively erode the Amazon.

After the decimation of the local indigenous population in the seventeenth century an estimated 3.65 million enslaved Africans were imported to Brazil, and the majority of these were brought to Brazil's first capital, Salvador da Bahia. Urban slave labour differed from plantation life; slaves were not passive victims of the system and many escaped to found their own '*quilombos*'.

Brazil did not abolish slavery until 1888. Initially the Portuguese authorities promoted miscegenation as a way of ensuring a Portuguese presence in under-populated regions. But, fearing the rising black population Brazil, subsequently opened its country to white immigrants, who were given preference

over black people in jobs, housing and education.

Governance

The Brazilian policy of ‘whitening' has denied the existence of ethnic minorities. Those unable to express themselves in the national language have been banned from voting. Since the United Nations World Conference against Racism, Xenophobia and related forms of Intolerance held in Durban, South Africa in 2001, Brazil has taken important steps to recognize the diversity of the nation, although the country still has a long way to go in order to reach racial equality.

Environmental issues

Environmental issues dominated the latter part of 1988 and much of 1989 when the murder of Francisco (Chico) Mendes, founder of the National Council of Rubber Tappers Union, brought Brazil's environmental problems to international attention. One of his close followers, Marina da Silva, currently serves as the Brazilian Minister for the Environment. Mendes' efforts led to the creation of 150,000 acres of extractive reserves, which have allowed rubber tappers to extract commercial products from the trees within this territory. As the Brazilian government continues discussions of hydroelectric dams in the Amazon River and other mega-projects, these tappers remain threatened.

International environmental organizations like Greenpeace have condemned the damage caused by large-scale development projects such as cattle ranching, industrial logging, and ‘slash and burn' farming techniques of peasant smallholders. In addition, the activities of an estimated 60,000 gold prospectors in the Amazon region has led to the release of large amounts of mercury into the environment. This continues to present a serious threat to the indigenous population and the rain-forest.

International criticism of the government's poor response to the threat to the environment persisted throughout the early 1990s. Of particular concern to many international observers was the plight of the Yanomami. The National Indian Foundation (FUNAI) was heavily criticized for failing to provide effective protection and support for Brazil's indigenous population. A new cabinet post of Minister with Special Responsibility for the Brazilian Amazon was created after the Yanomami massacre at Haximú in 1993. In June 1992 Brazil hosted the UN Conference on Environment and Development - otherwise known as the Earth Summit.

According to Survival International, in 2007 the Brazilian Socio-Economic-Environmental Institute began coordinating the ‘*Y Ikatu*' or ‘*Good water*' campaign to save the headwaters of the Xingu River, which is a major tributary of the Amazon. The campaign involves a combination of efforts and collaboration from the indigenous peoples of the region, as well as NGOs and farmers. Over the last 10 years, deforestation along the Xingu's headwaters has doubled. Eighteen tribes with a population of 10,000 live in this region and are dependent on the rivers for fish and drinking water. The Xingu park is home to 14 of these indigenous tribes, but the headwaters of the river lie outside the park and are therefore unprotected. Some tributaries have already dried up due to deforestation and forest fires.

Indigenous land rights

The 1988 Brazilian Constitution guaranteed indigenous forest peoples rights to inhabit their ancestral lands, though not their legal right to own them. It made no provision for land reform. In April 2005, after much delay, Brazilian President Luiz Inácio ‘Lula' da Silva ratified the Federal Supreme Court ruling to establish the Raposa Serra do Sol Indigenous Reserve in the state of Roraima. After many years of violence and land disputes in this region, this action called for the demarcation and titling of land for

a number of indigenous communities, including the Macuxi, Wapichana, Taurepang, Ingaricó and Patamona peoples, as well as the expulsion of non-indigenous settlers and rice farmers from the territory. Still, the Brazilian government has not fully implemented this decision. In August 2006, in response to an urgent request from the Indigenous Council of Roraima, and the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Brazilian government was urged to take action and follow up on this decision.

In response to international pressure, the government has begun to recognize its failings in managing indigenous lands and the limited scope of its actions in indigenous communities. Instead of mitigating bad relations with indigenous communities and their advocates, these limited actions have led to new concerns regarding the abandonment of indigenous people by the nation. The demarcation of indigenous land still has not been completed and is a continuing source of conflict. However, the land titling process is moving forward more quickly than in the past, in part due to pressure from the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which recommended in 2004 that the demarcation of all indigenous lands be completed by 2007, and that the state party adopt urgent measures to recognize and protect the right of indigenous peoples to own, develop, control and use their lands, territories and resources.

Despite these advances, problems continue throughout the reserves, in part, because the state environmental protection agency has only one staff member for every 2,000 sq km of protected land. FUNAI's activities have been severely curtailed in the past due to funding problems, and a lack of political will to register approximately 11 per cent of the nation's land to the indigenous community, which represents less than 1 per cent of the population. Where land has been demarcated, the exclusive rights of indigenous peoples to these resources is recognized under Article 231 of the constitution.

Many indigenous peoples continue to be threatened by illegal exploitation and colonization. For example, lengthy campaigning achieved the demarcation of a reserve belonging to the Yanomami, but no government action was taken to uphold the integrity of the reserve. In 1993 Yanomami continued to be the victims of premeditated attacks by illegal gold prospectors.

In the face of government failure, indigenous peoples have formally organized themselves through civil society organizations to defend their territory and their identity. There are currently over 250 registered indigenous non-governmental agencies in the greater northern region of Brazil, which is 20 times the number of groups registered ten years ago. These organizations have gained access to international sources of funding to support development activities in their communities and have conducted their own census reports.

President ‘Lula' da Silva has alienated indigenous peoples in two ways. His embracing of neoliberal economics and agri-business has stalled many of the land titling actions, leaving his government with, arguably, Brazil's worst indigenous rights record since the military regimes left power in 1985. The 2005 ‘Indigenous April', inspired by the 2004 Landless Workers Movement (MST), drew attention to land needs and put pressure on the government to demarcate and title new reservations, as it is now obliged to do by the constitution.

In July 2005, after much delay, Brazil awarded land title in a violently disputed case in Roraima State to the Macuzi, an indigenous group near the Guyanese border actively involved in agriculture and cattle raising. However, violence and killings continue to mark relations between indigenous peoples and landowners. In addition, and clearly linked to the demands for land and resources, indigenous leaders and other land rights protesters have been killed by suspected agents of large landowners and agri-business (largely industrial soy bean farmers) seeking access to indigenous lands. Amnesty International argued that the government has ‘laid the foundation for the current violence' and cited ‘the continuous

failure of Brazilian governments to act effectively to protect indigenous communities'.

Afro-descendants and land rights

With regard to Brazil's Afro-descendant populations, the international community has not fully recognized the importance of empowering Afro-Brazilians to become the leaders of their own liberation. Many Afro-Brazilian organizations are finding it increasingly difficult to secure international funding for their community-based activities and, despite raising awareness of the needs of Afro-descendants and a growing sense of black consciousness/identity, many groups are facing a major funding crisis.

The Palmares Foundation, established in 1988, continues to function as an important state institution for the accreditation and granting of lands to communities of the descendants of enslaved Africans, although for many activists the process is too complex and lengthy. Articles 215 and 216 of the Federal Constitution mandate the protection and preservation of these federally certified lands (or *quilombos*) and the Palmares Foundation assists in the securing of land titles for Afro-descendant communities. In 2007, the foundation identified 743 *quilombo* communities, 42 of which have been officially recognized and 29 of which have received titles. These rural communities are important historic and cultural reference points for the black movement as a whole, despite the fact that the majority of people of African descent in Brazil live in urban areas, often in *favelas*, where there are no land titles or formal ownership of property.

Social, economic and political rights of Afro-descendants

Monumental symbolic strides have taken place under the government of President ‘Lula' da Silva. For the first time in its history, Lula appointed four Afro-Brazilian national ministers, three of them women: Benedita da Silva, Minister of Social Services; Marina Silva, Minster for the Environment; and Matilde Ribeiro, who heads the Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality, a cabinet-level ministerial position.

Federal universities around the country have continued to implement affirmative action programmes and the federal government has mandated the teaching of African and Afro-Brazilian history in high schools and universities. There are government quotas that require 20 per cent of new positions in federal government agencies to be filled by Afro-Brazilians; Itamaraty - the Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs - is an exception; it has instead implemented admissions quotas for its prestigious training university, Rio Branco. The Ministry for the Promotion of Racial Equality has played an important role coordinating these new inter-agency initiatives, but there has been concern that the ministry faces severe structural limitations because it does not have an independent budget and instead must mobilize resources from the very agencies it is attempting to influence. Despite all this, Afro-Brazilians are still waiting for major social or political changes to benefit their communities. Moreover, the political crises in the latter part of the Lula administration have exposed corruption within the Partido dos Trabhaldores (PT or Workers Party), and shifted the party's attention away from issues of social inclusion as it defends itself against these allegations of corruption.

Brazil has also been in the forefront of affirmative action programmes, although not without controversy. Former Education Minister Paulo de Renato Souza voiced his concern that unprepared students might enter universities and called on the international community to help prepare Afro-Brazilian students for entrance exams. President of the High Court of Justice Paulo Costa Leite expressed concern that quotas represented an artificial way to allow black people to ascend in society, and that this may aggravate prejudice, although the federal court has declared the quotas constitutional. In 2006 a group of prominent opinion makers, including several leading Brazilian academics and artist Caetano Veloso, wrote a controversial letter to the Brazilian press condemning quotas. The fierce

response to this letter referred to as the ‘Manifesto Branco' by Afro-Brazilian activists and allies demonstrates how discussions about reparations and affirmative action programmes for Afro-descendants continue to engender fierce debates across the region.

Current state of minorities and indigenous peoples

In 2005 Doudou Diene, UN Special Rapporteur on Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related forms of Intolerance, visited Brazil and made recommendations on the importance of supporting affirmative action programmes, promoting cultural identity and youth development in the country. He followed up on this report with a visit to Brazil in 2006 for the Regional Conference of the Americas in Brasilia, an event that was envisioned as a continuation of the Santiago preparatory conference for the UN World Conference against Racism. At this meeting he met with civil society activists to discuss the findings from his report and analyse new paradigms of ethnic conflict and globalization. Immediately before this session in Brasilia, the Brazilian government hosted a meeting of the African Union in Salvador, Bahia, which was widely attended by African heads of state and international celebrities such as Stevie Wonder, who used the meeting as an opportunity to make a declaration in support of racial quotas.

Evidence of exclusion of the vast black minority in Brazil is rampant. Nearly 80 per cent of Afro-Brazilians live below the nation's poverty line, compared to 40 per cent of white citizens. Afro-descendants in Brazil earn half of what white groups earn; life expectancy is 6.5 years lower for blacks than for whites; and one half of all Afro-Brazilians are illiterate - some two and a half times the number of whites who cannot read or write. Only 4 per cent of Afro-Brazilians between the ages of 18 and 24 are in universities, compared to 12 per cent of whites. Three-quarters of all Afro-Brazilians have not completed secondary school, and 40 per cent of blacks have not completed elementary school. In the UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), Brazil ranks 69th. This is roughly the average of two Brazils divided by race: the HDI of a hypothetical Afro-Brazilian nation would come 101st, while an all-white nation would rank 46th. Social and economic progress in Brazil depends on the advancement of the country's large black population.

In 2007 Afro-Brazilians continued to earn less than 50 percent of the national average income. They also suffered from the highest homicide, poverty and illiteracy rates in a country, with one of the highest homicide rates in the world and the world's highest death rate by firearms.

Seriously under-represented in professional positions and in the middle and upper classes, Afro-Brazilians continued to be over-represented in prisons. In 2007 Afro-Brazilians made up more than 56 per cent of the prison population.The statistics for indigenous communities are just as troubling. The infant mortality rate in indigenous communities is almost three times the national average. A quarter of indigenous children do not have access to schools and 15 per cent of children between the ages of 10 and 15 are illiterate. Three-quarters of indigenous children live below the poverty line. The National Foundation of the Indigenous (FUNAI) reports that Brazil's indigenous people continue to face disease and poor health care, loss of native culture and recurring incursions, especially in the rainforest.

Likewise, regarding health and access to health care, indigenous communities find themselves collectively in an increasingly precarious situation. A recent study of the Javari Valley in the Brazilian Amazon - which is said to be the second largest indigenous territory in Brazil - warned that rates of malaria and hepatitis are spiralling out of control, with uncontacted tribes in the area being in grave danger. In 2006 it was estimated that 90 per cent of indigenous peoples in the area suffered from malaria. A further study by Survival International in 2007, of 306 indigenous people, revealed that 56 per cent were carrying the hepatitis B virus, 85 per cent had contact with hepatitis A and 25 per cent were carrying hepatitis C.

Local indigenous organizations in the area accuse the government of shirking its responsibilities under Article 231 of the Federal Constitution, which holds the state responsible for protecting the customs, languages and traditionally occupied territories of the indigenous population. Indigenous groups also hold the Brazilian authorities responsible for the provision of health care to communities and believe that they have taken insufficient action to combat the crisis.

In 2007 more than half of indigenous communities continued to live in poverty in areas where traditional ways of life are increasingly threatened by land development, agricultural expansion and mining.

However, there was also continued evidence in 2007 of eroding government concern over indigenous land rights especially since - according to long-time Brazilian indigenous rights advocate Sydney Possuelo - the head of FUNAI is reported to have claimed that indigenous people in the Brazilian Amazon have too much land.

This largely matches the attitude of Brazil's powerful elite, who seek even more Amazon deforestation for cattle and large-scale agriculture. Ranchers, land-grabbers, miners and loggers have already destroyed nearly one-fifth of the Brazilian rainforest. More than 17 per cent of the original tree cover has already been eliminated and what remains is disappearing fast.

Violent land wars between indigenous groups, ranchers, companies and farmers, increased in 2007, and a 10-year high was reached in the rate of murders of indigenous people. Killings were mostly related to land disputes and rural activists were specially targeted.

In September 2007 the indigenous Yanomami of Brazil's Amazon rainforest increased their protests against a draft mining law that may force them to expose their currently state-protected communal lands to international mining companies.

Mining on indigenous lands in Brazil is currently prohibited, however the draft law once again allows mining of indigenous territories, with Yanomami lands likely to be the most affected.

According to the Instituto Socioambiental the Lula government has created 15 million hectares of environmental conservation areas in Amazonia; however even though demarcated since 1992, a large proportion of this land has already been surveyed or explored by mining companies.

This could mean a repeat of the cycle of deforestation, and disease first suffered by Yanomami in the mid-1970s, during construction of Brazil's Northern Circumferential Highway, when nearly 20 per cent of the Yanomami died from lack of immunity.

As a world leader in ethanol production, biofuels from agricultural crops is important in the country's long-term economic vision. Indigenous small farmers in Brazil are steadily being pushed off lands cleared for soy production, sometimes violently. This is also affecting Afro-descendant and indigenous ‘nutcracker' women who, as of August 2007, continued fighting to retain access to the babaçú palm tree, which is native to the Brazil forest.

The babaçú palm grows wild in the 18.5 million hectare forest area extending across four states between the Amazon and the semi-arid north-east of the country. The 20-meter-tall palm tree has over 50 uses, among them: cattle fodder, natural medicine, house construction, basketry and fuel. The flesh of the nut is eaten or made into oil for cooking and lubrication, as well as soaps and other cosmetics.

Babaçú gathering dates back to pre-Columbian times. It now represents a major income source for half

a million mostly Afro-descendent and indigenous female Quebradeiras, who gather and process the babaçú nut. However, large-scale land appropriation is now making it increasingly difficult for women to access babaçú forests.

Since the 1980s, industrial farmers have been acquiring and enclosing vast parcels of primary land where the babaçú grows, and they now intend to clear-cut and burn the forest to breed cattle or grow soybeans for bio-fuel. They especially want to stop indigenous and Afro-descendant collectors from traversing the forested areas, even though the babaçú nut just falls to earth and otherwise remains unused. Deterrents include erecting barbed-wire fences or hiring gunmen.

The Interstate Movement of Babaçú Coconut Breakers (MIQCB) has been trying to negotiate access with the local, regional and national governments, and has been discussing the laws for free access to the babaçú forests. They have also held the government accountable for illegal logging and forest destruction.

Some researchers see potential in the babaçú palm for biofuel, but industrialists lack interest because of supply logistics and difficulty in processing the nut. NGO and university projects in 2007 continued to try to attract Afro-descendant and indigenous Quebradeiras women toward using babaçú for agro fuel, but collectors can earn more selling the multi-use nut than from processed oil. They are also well aware of the effects of the soy and sugarcane industries on independent farmers and remain uninterested in turning babaçú into a corporate biofuel activity.

The Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPIR) is in charge of coordinating President ‘Lula' da Silva's policies for Afro-Brazilians, indigenous communities, Roma, Jews and, to a lesser extent, Brazilian foreign relations with Africa (the SEPPIR minister has joined the president on all of his official delegations to Africa, including Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Cape Verde, Gabon, São Tomé and Principe and South Africa , and had a prominent role in the African Union meeting held in Salvador, Bahia in 2006). The SEPPIR ministry is made up of almost 150 staff members, the vast majority from activist backgrounds. Minister Matilde Ribeiro has effectively mobilized her team to implement projects and activities in a wide range of areas related to racial inclusion. In 2005, the ministry hosted the National Conference for Diversity, with representation from all of the minority groups and states in Brazil, and international representatives from key regions present at the UN World Conference in Durban. The minister has increased her outreach to indigenous communities in Brazil and has created a national platform for the small Roma community - which was prominently featured in the national press coverage of the event. Efforts to deal with the most vulnerable of the marginalized gathered momentum in mid-2007 when SEPPIR introduced the Quilombolas Development Programme that seeks to improve living conditions of communities that are among the most marginalized in Brazil. Initially it will benefit 525 *quilombo* settlements in 22 of Brazil's 26 states.

Despite the breadth of the activities SEPPIR has undertaken in the past three years, it still struggles for greater recognition by the Brazilian government, in part because the ministry lacks secure government financing. As a result, SEPPIR has turned to international donors to support programme activities, and is not well integrated into the government budget decision-making process.

The UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) reported that Brazilian women continued to be among the primary victims of international sex trafficking to Europe. The typical victims were darker-skinned women between 15 and 27 years of age.

The second term re-election of President 'Lula' da Silva in October 2006 was seen as a plus for minorities due to his commitment to social welfare reform. Da Silva won 77 per-cent of the vote in his north-east birthplace, which is home to darker-skinned, poorer Brazilians who especially benefit from

the government's ‘Bolsa Familia', cash-transfer programme.

Tackling racial discrimination

Brazilian courts are extremely reluctant to enforce discrimination cases, because discrimination is difficult for court employees to identify as a crime. Punishment for discrimination is so severe that judges are reluctant to recommend the required sentencing. Further, there is such a lack of understanding of racial discrimination by the court that, if an individual can demonstrate some non-European ancestry or connection to a person of another racial group via marriage - a standard that many Brazilians meet - the aggressor of a racist attack is exonerated. Despite advances in documenting racial discrimination, bringing forward cases of discrimination is often futile under the current system because there are seldom any convictions. In a study of 22 states by the Catholic University of São Paulo only 394 of 651 discrimination cases were brought to trial, and there was not a single conviction for racial discrimination among the cases presented to the court. Senator Paulo Paim has been a major advocate for a Statute for Racial Equality in Brazil. This statute sets mandatory guidelines for sentencing and strengthens criminal penalties for committing racist acts. The statute, however, continues to face major challenges in the Brazilian parliament. Although it passed the lower house, it is unlikely that it will become law in the near future because of the increasing debate on issues of race in Brazil.

Nevertheless racial discrimination continued to receive more recognition and remediation attempts from the ‘Lula' government in 2007. For example, a quota law still under consideration will institute a system of racial preferences for the civil service, private sector and universities. Currently Afro-Brazilians represent only 16 percent of the university population. During 2006-7 more than 30 universities voluntarily implemented a quota system.

Brazil has taken a leadership role in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights at the Organization of American States (OAS). Brazil is the sole supporter of the Special Rapporteur for African Descendants, a position held by Dr Clare Roberts, former president of the Inter-American Court. Brazil has also taken the lead role in the Inter-American Convention against Discrimination, which is currently under consideration by the Inter-American Court of Human Rights. This convention attempts to provide minorities with a regional mechanism to redress human rights violations throughout the Americas. Currently, a case of racial discrimination must be tried as a generic human rights violation, because there is no statute that oversees cases of racial discrimination in the OAS. The creation of the Inter-American Convention is a vital step to provide African-descendants and other minorities with a form of redress in countries where national courts have been reluctant to address racial inequities.

Currently every Spanish- or Portuguese-speaking country in the Americas has officially yielded jurisdiction to the Inter-American Court over basic human rights matters. Many indigenous communities have successfully used the Court to influence their governments into granting concessions they would not have otherwise been offered. African-descendant communities are beginning to explore the potential of the Court as an instrument for asserting their legal rights. This ethnic group has much to gain from filing lawsuits on the grounds of racial discrimination, because the act of filing a lawsuit in effect creates a public record that African-descendants consider themselves the victims of racism in their society, thereby negating claims by some governments that black people do not face discrimination.

Tapeba and Tremenbe communities from the northern coast were among the first to be colonized and assimilated by the Portuguese. In 1993 the court ruling which expelled Kaiowá and Nandevi Guarani from the state of Mato Grosso do Sul to make way for cattle ranchers was overruled by a regional tribunal; it recognized their original right to the land and ruled that the National Indian Foundation (FUNAI), an agency of the Brazilian government created in 1988, should demarcate it. Although most community members did eventually return to their land, the situation in Mato Grosso do Sul remains

tense even today, with continual land disputes, death threats and murders of indigenous leaders and community members by assassins (‘*pistoleiros*') hired by local farmers. According to the Indigenous Missionary Council (CIMI), Mato Grosso do Sul reported the highest number of murders, general violence, and land disputes from 2003 to 2005. Suicide has also become a serious problem among indigenous communities, and the Kaiowá people in particular, among whom there have been over 150 suicides in recent years. The Kaiowá are nomadic people who have traditionally migrated in search of the land without evil. Thus increases in suicide may be in response to dire living conditions and modern encroachments on their lifestyle as well as an attempt to reach this promised land. At least 17 of the 60 isolated indigenous groups in the Amazon are in danger of extermination as a result of murders and other practices initiated by illegal settlers and agricultural companies.